

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Women in Labor Unions

Personal Experience

O H 1871

KATHLEEN VASKO

Interviewed

by

Erin Holmes

on

June 3, 1997

KATHLEEN VASKO

Kathy Vasko graduated from Ursuline High School in 1968 and then received a scholarship to attend Beauty School. She graduated from the Ohio Beauty School in 1969 and worked as a beautician for several years. It was not until her divorce in 1977 that she began working at General Motors. She began working at GM to support her two children, Vincent and Danielle, and to receive medical benefits in order to properly care for her kids. In 1993, Kathy married her second husband Ken, and gained two step-children, Shawn and Eric. She was very influential in persuading her new husband to become actively involved in the union and he is now an elected alternate committee-person for the UAW Local #1112.

Kathy is the chairperson of the Women's Committee and she actively is involved in the Election Committee and CAP Committee (a political action committee). In addition to this, she helps out with as many other committees as possible and also stays active in her community. She served on the American Heart Association Executive Board for 12 years, but she had to step down as her children became older and more involved.

H This is an interview with Kathleen Vasko for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on Women in Labor Unions, by Erin Holmes, on June 3, 1997, at Maag Library, at 3 10 p m.

Start off by telling me about what it was like growing up in the Youngstown area

V We grew up in very poor poverty My dad was very ill We lived in the projects on Park Street until I was about 13 years old Then we moved out of there and we rented homes So I grew up mostly going to school in so many different places after that I went to Ursuline and graduated from there Friends had helped my parents through that and by then it was only \$300 to send us and that is a big difference today

Then I got a scholarship to do hair through Ohio Beauty School of Culture I went there and did hair and graduated real quick I went full-time and started doing hair Then I married in 1970 I graduated in 1968. We had two children, a boy and a girl, and I was then divorced in 1978 I started out at General Motors at this time My husband decided to quit his job prior to that and I had two children and needed insurance I was always a worker and kept on going I was not about to be poor the way I grew up so I kept on pushing and pushing I kept working, and raising the children, and getting baby-sitters I re-married and I have been married now for four years. We live in North Jackson I have two step-children, and we are doing just great and we have come a long way. We are getting involved with everything

In fact, I even got my husband involved in the union. He has got 30 years at GM (General Motors) When I met him in 1991 I got him going to the union meeting He was always drawn to the union but never involved, and now he is an elected committeeman He has really taken into consideration that you cannot take anything for granted

H Tell me about how it was trying to raise your children while working a factory job

V Sometimes I look back and to be honest with you, I do not know how I did it I still do not know how I did it I am going to be 47 this year I was 27 when I started out at General Motors I would work 10 hours a day, I would work five days a week, and on Saturday, we worked every other Saturday eight hours. My children were only two and four At the time it was very hard I put ads in the paper for a babysitter and I will swear by this 100% I had 30 years and older in order to have a babysitter I had people call me and say, "Why can I not babysit?" They were rude I told them that I was gone from like 4 00 in the afternoon until early in the morning I felt as though a younger person, five days week -- because my mom and dad watched them on Saturdays only -- I just felt like an older person would not have men coming in and out You have got to remember one thing, that is very important I had a lady that had fixed income, I paid her cash She had to buy her own pills, so I paid her \$100 a week I was working sometimes 12 hours because I would stay over and work an extra 2

hours I never had to worry She was like a little grandma I have women get called of the line because a boyfriend had come over and the girl was fighting and they did not have a baby-sitter there and she was nervous So I learned from experience that an older person, if you are out there and you do have to work, it is the hours you have to remember. If you are going to gone all night, a younger person is going to have a boyfriend My children were my first priority I want everyone to remember that

H You were very lucky to find such a dependable babysitter.

V There are a lot of women out there that you would be surprised they get maybe \$400 a month and they do not have health care Including my own mother, if it was not for our whole family helping her She would go get two pills She would say, "I want my prescription filled." And they said that it would be \$100 She would just say, "What!" You would be surprised if you start talking around to people. I have been very lucky I started out there in 1977 and I have paid prescriptions. Sometimes you take it for granted through your family, through your mom and dad, and everything There are a lot of people out there that could use that extra cash

H What were some of your expectations when you first started working at General Motors?

V I did not think that I was going to make it [Laughter] I am being honest I used to come home and I could not get my coat off I would crawl The only thing that kept me making it was working two jobs prior to that, and I was not making as much as I was at General Motors, and I was going around the clock And the insurance That is what kept me going, was the insurance for the children My son had like 11 ear surgeries That really kept me going And I said, "I am going to make it "

I have this theory, I get on this ladder. When I went and I divorced, I felt like my whole world caved in. We have two young children, you have a new job, and if you put it in your mind you are not going to make it, you are not I really believe that I have seen people I know for myself I would just lay back and say, "I am going to give up " Then no one is going to worry about helping you You have to help yourself So my expectations were I was going to walk up that ladder and I was not going to fall off it. And I did

H How long after you were working at General Motors did you become involved with the union?

V I was a little bit involved with the union I really believed in the union I never really got involved until about two years I would help sell tickets and got to know a lot of the people on the committees and if they needed

a little bit of help for something then I did that But, that was about it

H What made you want to start getting more involved?

V I believe that our union is not made in stone and what everyone fought for prior to this Somebody else has to keep it up when they retire.

H You have been working at General Motors for 20 years?

V Yes

H How have you seen the union change from that time?

V Well, management and union used to fight They used to go face to face and nose to nose I used to think one of them were going to go off the platform where I worked at one time I have seen the union and management about five years ago really do a big change It started taking place a little bit prior to this In 1986, I noticed it started where we would start having committees together where they were joint I have seen the other locals going to different regional conferences Their chairman decided that he was not working with management and they closed him down They turned around and our chairman, Al Alli, decided to work with management to make this joint. And, little by little, a lot of the people, the old timers, would say, "Oh, wow, we have got to be with management " They do not understand that by working with them through the years, we are getting more joint programs to help the people.

Just like Civil Rights, your EAP, which is your Employee Assistance Program Our company, which is management, is really believing in all this This program is helping all people, not only just the drug addicts, the alcohol, and plus there are family problems There are a lot of people that have emotional family problems that miss just as much as the drug addicts We have a TWC Program now, which is joint with management. If you are hurt you used to have to go out on the street and have to be on sick leave and lay there And sometimes you only needed three weeks Well you have a week without pay and then you have three weeks with just a little less So now they have this -- that is where I am a coordinator in now -- actually, you do a little rework where you do not have to do walking and it is the hardening program when you come back from sick leave. And it is just, little by little, they have a suggestion program There are so many programs that we have grown together But we still have this were union is first and management is second even though we work together with them We know where our union is supporting us

H How have you seen the role that women play in the union change over the years?

V I used to see a lot of women that never got involved, that just used to accept,

"Well let us see who is running Okay I will vote for this person A woman running? She cannot do the job " I used to have women tell me this. And I said, "Why?" "Because they have families to take care of " I said, "The woman does the work out there " If you are going to YSU you are probably going to end up working one day, probably raising a family You are going to find out that through the years, if you are working you are going to come home, your job is never done You have children, you have clothes to do, you have cooking, you have shopping, you have bills, you have organizations for the next day's work There is just one thing after another How could women say they could not have a position? So the women today now, I have seen them bite. They have to struggle all their life They have to form double the work in order to prove themselves out there in the men's force out there, especially at General Motors

Little by little, they have been more accepted There were a couple women that did get in that brought it right back down to one because once the got in, they did not do the job right and it looked bad on us But we have come a long way We have women on the E Board now, and that is the first time The women are getting appointed now also They are getting more and more respected in their opinions being important I hope to see more and more I hope you women at YSU start keep on getting on strong. This is really important to us

H You said that women are on the E Board?

V E Board is the Executive Board who makes the decisions for our union In fact, they are the ones that spend our money We have money that is in funds and we get letters from people who want donations, bills that have to be paid out, buying stuff, they have the control of it It is a really important job

H You are involved in several committees at General Motors, the Women's Committee for example

V I am the chairperson of the Women's Committee

H What kind of things do you do as the chairperson for the Women's Committee?

V Well, I am the chairperson of the Women's Committee. I took over four years ago I was on another committee prior to this Before I took this -- I will give you a little note -- I sat there and I used to listen to the chairperson dictate all the time And I used to give a question and they would go, "Quit your whining " Now see, being a women, this is what you went through [A] Man could ask the same question and it was a different outlook I said, "I was not whining, I was giving you a question Why could we not, as a committee, have all opinions in it?" So when I took over the Women's Committee four years ago, the first thing I was going to do is direct, not dictate

The Women's Committee cannot do very much in the union itself because you would step, then, on your EAP and all your other committees. So, we deal mostly on the outside. The Women's Committee can direct into the work force. I have women that come in as new hires. I have women that have been there for 10 years and do not even know how to ask for help yet. I direct them. I make sure that their problems are taken care of. I know every little office there is. If I do not know who is in charge, I will find out for them.

We deal like, for the retard children in Salem, they had a prom and we did that for our Easter project. We gave them \$300 towards it and we went there and took pictures. It was really an emotional moment. We did Tod Children's Hospital. We made about 40 baskets one time for Easter there. We have given to the settlement in the Northside of Youngstown. Different projects on the outside we do. We do old age homes, we do children, we did the people that did not have any homes. We bought a TV for there and a VCR and different things like that. We cannot make profit, so everything we do make, we spend out on Easter and Christmas in the community.

H That is really good. Are you involved in any other community based committees? You yourself, not the Women's Committee?

V I was on the American Heart Association Board for about 12 years. I got out of that because my mom was real sick and it was just too hard. My children were more involved and I would always be there for them. I am just done sitting on the Board now. I used to go and travel to conferences and do a lot. And that is about it on the outside. I have a mother-in-law who lives with me, I have a mom that is still sick, and so I run around the clock between a full time job and all the committees.

H You are a very busy lady.

V Yes.

H It is amazing that you found the time to do this interview.

V That was what was hard for the first two weeks when we were trying to meet. Remember I was telling you about the Election Committee. I am on that. I was elected for it and this was our election for the whole entire plant, which is our AI Alli chairman to our president, vice-president, to the smallest committees, then also your E Board members and stuff like that. We had a run off which was the following week. There was just a lot of involvement.

H What kind of feelings run through the plant during elections?

V Animosity. This election was the worst election I have been through. I wore an AI Alli shirt and, say you were my girlfriend and we would have lunch together,

and she had the opponents shirt on We would sit and have lunch together I feel like everyone had an opinion Everyone is allowed to vote for whom they please I have an attitude you should never judge anybody for who they are going to vote for. If you do not vote, then I have a problem. I would rather see somebody vote then not vote If you really believe in them then go for it, do not step down Do not let anybody step down Always just believe in what you believe in I have had where people come in your face and tell you this and that I say, "Now wait a minute You have a right and I have my right And when it is all over with, whoever is there, I do not care who it is, you should respect That is just the way it is "

H What position did you have to have a run off for?

V We had to have a run off for the E Board We had Sergeant of Arms, which is a guide like And your two committee men, which they had a tie. The bigger election part, the president, vice-president, and your chairman all won It was a lot of people that went for the president who won this time, and the people that went, they are still having this little feud A few of them. And we keep telling them that it is over with You know, you have got to respect who is there And of course, I had the opposite button on, too [Laughter] The one who won So there are times people will get, like, a little attitude. But I just show them I am strong I walk right in, I say hello to everybody I say hello to the president, "Do you need any help?" Now, he has the right to remove me He has the right to remove me as chairperson of the Women's Committee, and everybody keeps on coming up to me and asking me. "Kat, what is going to happen?" And my attitude is, if he wants me off, he has that right I did a great job in four years, I believe the committee is what it is because they are the committee that they are I am not a committee, we all are

I am very organized Our meeting starts at four, we are done by five Before I used to go in there, we were done, maybe, by six And we would get paid for one hour You do not open mail when you go into the meeting, you are supposed to all ready, have department procedure done and be ready. We will see what happens

H What are your duties as a member of the election committee?

V Running the election legal, first of all Making sure that your workers that you do pick, whoever the president chooses, you are allowed to pick a couple Everybody that is in higher office usually gives us a couple to work on the election committee When they work, they are not allowed, not even to their best friends on that day, to say, "I hope this person wins " You are on the election committee I do not want to hear this I will remove you I want to make sure it is done right I do not even leave For the 12 hours that I am there, I might leave for a couple minutes to go to the restroom and that is it I take it very serious I believe that making sure if there are any appeals or any problems, that we go

over it and see if it is worth while to let it happen or not We had five appeals with this big election and all of them were shunned down for every one.

H How was the voter turn-out for this election?

V Enormous There were 5700 that voted. Usually on a run off you get maybe 2800 people You are lucky if you get 2500 out of maybe 6000 We hit almost 5000 for the run off. People are wanting to get involved

H What do you think is spurting this?

V Younger people We have, on C crew, a lot of young people that do not even know what is going on They see a person and they think this is great And it is terrible And sometimes they have not been in there in the union We get people elected into office because there are great people out there that are real friendly to you, and you think they are wonderful, but when it comes down to doing a job, they do not even know where to begin They do not know this I am glad to see younger people involved In fact, I think younger people should be on the committees After this goes on and if I stay on, that is what I want to bring on We do have 20 older people In 10 years I hope to be gone and I hope to make the younger people as strong as we are There are a lot of them that do want to get involved

H How are the young women getting involved?

V Community services. They want to get on the Women's Committee and they want to get voted in on the election committee They will ask to help different places to help get their name out That is the first thing. I helped a lot. I still help every committee out there I sell tickets I am on Cap Council too, but before that I used to sell all the tickets and for community service I have 500 tickets now I am selling for the Recreation and Community Services I have always done tickets for everybody

H That is really great What is the Cap Council?

V It is your council for putting people in office in the Mahoning and Trumbull counties

H So it is kind of a political action?

V It is a political action

H How active is the union in this?

V Very active We endorse certain candidates They come to us for endorsement

and the majority of the people that we endorse gets voted in

H That is both Mahoning and Trumbull counties?

V Yes, and Columbiana

H How would you say the strength of your union at General Motors is?

V Very strong. I think the UAW is very strong and I just hope that they never back down. The younger people want to get involved but there are a lot of things that the younger people do not understand. A lot of the younger people that I work with think that management is great. Remember when I was telling back then, how we are starting to work together, management does work better with us now, even on the line when you are doing your job. The younger people do not realize what we fought for to get this. We have to emphasize that you cannot like management more than your union. They are liking their foreman better than their committeeman. When they get in trouble, the committeeman is the one that protects them, goes to labor with them, and keeps them from getting thrown out. If they need a day off, they are the ones that fight for it. Management is the one that will throw you out. Right now they are not having a problem, but down the road you never know. This is what we need to emphasize with the younger people, that their check that they get, without that union check, it can go down to \$7 an hour instead of \$16. You never really realize

H How did the women interact with one another on the floor?

V I have seen both. I have been on the job and the next minute I hear all this yelling and screaming. And I look down and this one girl who is doing her job, another girl had crossed through and got face to face with them screaming. This girl here works right where you can see her on the next line. Then this girl started screaming at her foreman, and she started screaming. Well I had, prior to then, worked up the line, and I went down and talked to her. I had a few minutes and I told her to take a deep breath. All she wanted to do was fight this other girl.

This was 1996 at this time, "You do not argue with your union sister. No matter what, this is your union sister. You will lose your job, that is number one. You will get back, but in the meantime, look at what you are doing. The way she treated you, you just treated your foreman. I do not believe in taking a foreman over the person." But I said, "You just did to him and the language you just used to him is what she did to you and you just did no better than what that person did to you. He was coming up here to try and calm you down." I have seen fist fights through the years of women rolling, I mean rolling on the floor. And you know what guys do? "Yeah."

I told her I would call the committeeman. I went in there to call and the person doing my job in the meantime was my coordinator, who relieves you on

certain things, told me to go ahead. So I called the committeeman down there. The committeeman is the one that, in each area there is a committeeman that protects the union brother and sister. I got him down there and he calmed her down and then told the other girl that she is not allowed in that area, and then explained to her all her rights. Then she came up there later and said thanks and that she was glad I talked to her. She had only been there two years. I told her, "It took us a long time to go through the years. I do not want to see women fighting with women. You are not going to like everybody in this plant. The woman out there, you are going to have to look at her." They judge people sometimes about what they look like, who is talking to somebody. You should judge somebody for what they are doing next to you and working with you. I have seen the women getting a lot better.

The new women that came in, I see a lot more arguments and fights. I have seen hands on, which has not happened lately. I see the younger crowd now needs to learn. They need to know that you are not going to like everybody. You can work with somebody and you do not have to hang around with them and you do not have to like them. You can say I am doing my job and go home. I have just seen some change in the new batch that we got, they are younger and they are feisty.

H How do the women tend now to be more likely to band together to elect women in new positions?

V A little bit more. The two girls that got elected, this is three years they have ran. This is the third year they ran. The first year they did not get voted in. The second year they did not get voted in. And the guys really started seeing that they were out there and they are struggling to walk out into the force, they are asking people. There is a change, a big change. Even the men were even talking great. It was great, it was really great.

I still see a black and white issue out there, and I see woman issues. You can get a nice looking woman and you can see another man talking to another woman, and men do a lot of talking, too. It is not just the women. In my area, the guys will always tease me. If you do not pay their bills, you should not worry what they do. That is a good theory. I worked in an area and I was the only woman. There were no other women in this area and there must have been 75 men before you see another woman. Somebody would come by and go to say something, I did not care. I do not pay their bills. If they are talking, whatever they do, that is their business. I do not want to talk about somebody. Everyone else started doing it. I got the respect from all those guys, and some of them were trying to get me to talk. I do not want to hear it. If you, as a person out there in any type of field that you work at, allow somebody to talk about somebody else, then you are no better than they are. And you keep on letting it go, remember when they were behind your back and they do it that way, they are going to talk about you whether you like it or not, and that is a fact.

I have been out there 20 years. I have worked with men, women,

religious people, I have worked with drug addicts, I have worked with people that are drunk, people that just hated blacks, hated whites I have worked with them all And I do not think that you should talk about anybody Really, eventually, once you do that, people all in that whole area will start respecting you and that is what they will talk about you about You watch it and you try it. It works It really works So when you work out there with the people like I do, and any type, even sometimes a small little office can be very important

H How do the women and the men interact?

V. Like in what way?

H How have the interactions between men and women changed over the years that you have been there, as far as respect?

V Big time When I hired in there I was naive I was 27 years old, but I was still naive My children today know more that I did when I was 27 I mean really I have never really been around anything really I have a brother that is a priest I was brought up where you never said a bad word, let alone S-H-I-T or H-E-L-L at the house Real religious I never saw my brother in underwear That sounds funny to you but I was in high school, graduating my boyfriends mother and I were sitting downstairs in the family room and my boyfriend ran out of the shower in underwear upstairs and I thought I was going to die His mother was like, "What is the matter?" I had six brothers and I never saw one in underwear We always had to be covered 90 degrees and you had to be covered.

When I hired in and had been working on my job, you cannot leave your job This is about the area that you work right here You work here and you go back, you go to your job and you come back There would be naked pictures of women from Playboy There is a wall right here and lockers right all over here and they are all hanging there I had to stare at these pictures It was disgusting, and you could not say anything If you said something, the more they would put up. Every other word was F I had a person working over here, every other word was an F word and then I had someone over here playing religious tapes It was just extreme

Talking about filth, they treated the woman like a dog I hired in there in 1977, if you walked up the line, it was like you were walking up naked. You hated to leave your area Did you ever see those prison movies where they scream and everything? That is how they would treat you You would actually just want to put your head down and go to the restroom and come back down You go to go to the cafeteria, I went one time I have been there 20 years Now I still do not go to the cafeteria to eat there I usually just go get my food In the beginning it was really bad You go in there and you are sitting there, you are talking to your girlfriend, eating, and all the chairs are starring at you because there are not many women there Then all of the sudden all these men are starring at you. They say vulgar things to you in the cafeteria I do not know if I

should say that here on this tape but, it was not bad words. It was like, if you needed a place to sit you know where you can sit. You go to take a bit of a sandwich and somebody is staring at you and you turn around, put the sandwich down and you walk out. If that was their children or wife, they would not be doing it. But all the men, that is how they used to treat us. We had no rights. In 1977, we had none.

Today, there is not one naked picture hanging in that plant. If someone would to say the things that they said to you then, there are civil rights now here to protect you. You do not want to bring people up on charges, you just want to direct them so you get respect. I am not the type of person to bring a person up on charges because all I want to do is tell you that I want the respect that your wife and daughter would have. That is my attitude. Any woman that is mistreated in that plant, that is where I jump in. I do not like it. We have come a long way. 1977, 20 years now, I will tell you what, there is not a naked picture, to be able to walk, they talk with you with respect now. That is good.

H Who initiated the changes? Did management handle that or did union or both?

V The union first, then management has to go to the union and then, in order to have it in the plant, then eventually they say, "Yes, this is great." They have been working together and it has been a profit. The new people that are coming in, if it is summer help or if it is full time, they do not know what it was like. We have got to explain to them that it takes a lot and we have got to protect each other. Even if they are doing wrong, we try to guide them.

H. Do you now have education classes for sexual harassment for the members and people that work there?

V No, but if they need any pamphlets or if they want to talk to somebody about it, they do have to put a call in and somebody will talk to them about it. If you just feel lost, something is wrong, something is uneasy about someone, you can go to a program where you go to medical. Medical then calls up to the EAP which is the Employee Assistant Program. You will go up there. If they call a line and ask where you are, Medical will say, "Well they are still here." They never let anyone know where you are at. You can just have a problem with maybe someone there or at home, whatever. They will guide you.

H That is really good. How would you characterize the attitudes of people in general about unions in the shop?

V I can answer that two ways. I know a lot of people who will say, "I hate the union." But in the next minute, I will say, "I would not work in a shop where there was not a union." And they will go, "Well I do not want there to be no union here." You could take that, when somebody says, "I hate the union," you take it two ways. I cannot let something go. I have got to ask you a question why

That is how I have learned I asked them, and every single one of them will not take the union out of the plant They just do not like some of the ways the union is doing things There are a lot of old timers that hate the union and management working together But they do not realize that it is progress for us. It gave more people jobs By union and management working together, and all the new jobs that we have had to help the people, we were able to hire more people in our plants. Because these people are off the line are now doing jobs in the offices, and they are turning around It is great because now we are able to hire more people in our plant. That is the way you have got to look at it.

H How would you encourage more women to become more involved in the union?

V Go to the union meetings, first of all They are only once a month They are not during the summer Usually May is our last month, we only had one June meeting Remember I told you about our big election? Well they had to be sworn in So when they get sworn in, it had to be, since our election was in May, June they had to get sworn into our meeting So now we will not have a meeting during July, August, or September, and our first one will be in October. They need and go be seen at these meetings once a month Once you are seen there, little by little, they notice you, whether you think they do not, they do When I first ran for office 10 years ago for election committee, a guy came up to me and said -- he was with 5 other gentlemen -- he said, "I voted for you " [I] Did not know none of them from Adam I said, "Thank you." I remember this so I tell people, "Go to union meetings."

You will eventually know somebody that somebody will know somebody and you will start talking. You are intertwining and before you know it, they are going to start having help on different things Then you start signing to get on different committees If you do not have the time, still go to union meetings, and still get involved with helping Then maybe when you have more time, it really helps

H What were some of the persuasive tactics that you used to get your husband involved in the union?

V First of all, we met, my girlfriend who is now on E Board, who won the election, She introduced me This is his exact words he said, well as I walk down the steps to go from this tunnel into General Motors she goes, "I will point you out to her " As soon as I walked down he goes, "That is a union suckie " Because I was so involved with the union, he saw me here, he saw me there He called all those people union suckies It was because they were just so involved all the time It was not a bad word We laughed about it today He has 31 years this year, and we met in 1991 I said, "Well, I am going to go to the union meeting " Okay, so a couple of them I went And then I said, "Why don't you go with me? You can go " So he started going little by little He started seeing all the people

that he knew and they started talking and he got real good

Then he worked in the back, what they called the tri-level, where they drove the cars off, from there he wanted to change his job and he came to me and asked me, "Hon' what do you think about me taking this other job?" I said, "Well it is \$ 50 more an hour. You would do great with it because you work well with people. You are a loveable person. You would go out of your way for these people and that is what these people need. A coordinator is a job where, if you are working on the line with me, there are usually seven or eight people who work on a line, and this coordinator has these people here to service their call. If you have to go to the restroom, they come over and they let you go. And then they will let me go and that is all they have to take care of. If I am having a hard time maybe with a part, they are here to help you. Some of them only have seven or eight people, have attitudes like, "Hey what are you bothering me for?" And they sit for 10 hours

And my husband would do anything for anyone. I think he would do good "I think you need to make a move but that is your decision. I am going to tell you the good part of it and I am going to tell you nothing about bad because I think it is going to be all for the best. But I am going to let you make the decision." So he did. And then he started doing what they call overtime book, taking care of all the people in that department and start making sure everything was right. And he kept still going to union meetings. And the next minute I know, he says to me, "What do you think about if I got involved in a committee?" I said, "Go for it." He goes, "Really?" And I said, "Ya. Whatever you want, you should go for in life. Don't just sit there and think about it and then later on down the road say, I should have tried it." If you lose you lose. You did not lose anything. You do not lose your job. You just do not get that position. And you just keep on doing the best job that you can do. He goes, "Yeah, I do." Well and then he won. It is great. I did not want to tell him to do something. I think they should make there own opinion. All you can do is direct them and explain things to them, but let them make the decision and tell him whatever he wanted to do, you support him. That is the main thing.

H While you have been working at General Motors, have you had any strikes in the plant?

V No. We had them like two minutes before 12 and we were all ready. [Laughter] I was ready. We were all going to go to this little bar. You have got to remember we are working in a plant. There are times I have walked out and I had seven pairs of jeans and I had tops I wore at General Motors. I had jobs I would sometimes walk out and I was filthy. And other people can walk out real clean. It just matters certain areas and stuff. But we were always going to go there. They had good sandwiches and we would all meet there. I do not drink, and his one bar did not have any cranberry juice. So they bought a big jug of cranberry juice for me. We did not go. We had to work until 2:30.

H Have you gotten involved with other strikes in the valley?

V Yes We went to Superior I have been to Brainard Rivet I was on television and they kept teasing me I was on television when they had them at the union hall a lot of times, when we were ready to go out on strike and no matter what was going to happen, we were real close We told everybody when Alli went out, they interviewed me And no matter what, I was there at that union hall As soon as we heard it we were right there. I had just gone to bed about two and a half hours I got the call We have been to Cleveland. We have been to Washington, solidarity strikes We have been to Akron and Cleveland a lot I cannot remember the names of the different places, but then the one downtown, that machine place just this past summer, we were there

H Do a lot of people from your local get involved?

V Yes We believe that the people that are not union do not understand. If our General Motors were to shut down, and there are a lot of people who are out there, I do not know if you have been around it, there are businesses out there in our Youngstown area right now, "I hate Packard people I hate General Motors people " What are they whining about now? This is a person that owns Wal-Mart This is the person, I am not going to tell you the Chevy dealer, but they are cutting down Packard and General Motors people, and this is a Chevy dealer

What they do not understand is that if they shut both these plants down in this community, who is it going to affect? All your car dealers It is going to affect Giant Eagle, WalMart, K-Mart, because the people cannot spend People do not realize that when people are working, yes, they are making money But there is also a center, and each thing branches because then they are buying clothes, they are buying food, they are sending them to college, they are buying cars and on and on and on Once these people do not have these jobs anymore and everyone is making \$6 and \$7 an hour, it is going to be called like a Blue Monday. Everything will just shut down The people do not look beyond that All they do is think General Motors people make \$100,000 a year I make \$50,000 And I always say, "Yeah, you could make \$100,000, but you know what you would be working?" Those guys are working seven days a week, 12 hours a day They have no life In fact, they do not even know how to live anymore That is where it is at And if you want to work that way, then yes, then those people make \$100,000 a year

Nobody really knows what it is like until you work out there I have had, while working on the rear of a car, I have had it come and hit me in the back of my legs I have had, while bending over and doing repairs in a car, the hood of the thing just slashed right down I was doing the AC pipe in the van, and the hood was not hooked right, it hit me in the head and I woke up over there Remember I told you I started out there and I could not take my coat off, and by the time I got home I tried to take my coat off and I could not I hurt so bad And then you had to get up in the morning with the children I did not think I was

going to make this twenty years later

H What would you say in response to someone who said, "Oh, those are union people They are just whining because they want more money "

V First of all, I would find out why they say that, where they work. Do they own a business? And then how it would affect them because eventually it just shuts down everything We want more money? If we do not fight for economy, to keep it going the way it is used to -- the unions do not fight for that -- Youngstown would not be as profitable as it is today. If we were left at a stand still, Youngstown would just keep going down and down, and the businesses would go down.

It is not that the unions are fighting and crying We do not want you to baby us We just want you to realize that without the union you cannot realize what it is going to be like Take everything away, all the taxes, everything the people are spending and go out there and work Do that job everyday. It is hard to explain You think it is a lot of money. \$50,000 a year is a lot of money, but when you think about the hours that they put in and the hard work they put in. There are some jobs you get here and there that are easy, but even the easy jobs take a toll on you If they do not like union, then go down south where there are no union places there and start watching what is going on down there. It is terrible. You see people working for \$6 an hour, \$7 an hour working just like us Usually you have the poor or you have the extreme rich now and there is no union

And the children that are out there today, this is where we are having a problem now, because what you just said, there are a lot that feel that way We do not need this union and they are working at General Motors These new people are working and I see it They do not think they need their union They think that check is made in stone. And General Motors wants to break the union Now see the rivet, how they pull everything out and move them down to a non-union place Did you know they made profit in the last four years more than anywhere? This quarterly report at Brainard Rivet, did you know that it exceeding real high and they shut them down because they are non-union All these people are out of work and it is sad. If it happened to them, it will eventually happen to Packard and General Motors, and I hope I am gone by then

H Does your union take any kind of stance on the temp agencies that the companies hire in temp workers for \$6 50 an hour?

V That is management hiring For the offices hiring, no they have nothing to do with that

H So General Motors does not hire in any temp workers?

- V There is like some kind of secretarial people there. My one girlfriend works in the office and they started them off as Kelly girls or something. Is that like a temp?
- H Actually what I was thinking of, Honda actually hires people into the factories through temp services like, audio or man power. They hire factory workers through temp services.
- V They hire through unemployment offices. They have names pulled out at the unemployment office. That is where they go. It is the Warren unemployment office that they go to. Why it is just the Warren one, I do not know.
- H I do not want to take up too much of your time, I know that you are busy so we can start asking some winding up questions. How does the union view the Family Leave Act, or how do they respond to it?
- V They love it. They really love it because the union knows that, through the years, there are people that never need it, but when you do need it and it is there. Management was not very happy about it because, now remember, when you are out they have got to replace you and still pay for you, like insurance and everything like that. They are not giving anybody any hard times. I have seen three cases so far. It is a good feeling that we have it.
- H You have mentioned the Women's Committee, the Elections Committee, and then the CAP Committee. Are you involved in any other committees?
- V. I did support the community services and recreation. I am the TWC coordinator now since January 5. It is a new position. It is called the Hardening Program. People come back from sick leave. I work with the doctors and nurses in the plant. We have meetings every Wednesday. The people that are coming back send paper work that they will be coming back. They come to our meeting on Monday. You cannot be in the program for longer than 30 days. They know you are there. You work, now, with the people, because people are stopping you and what needs to be done. So that is almost like another little committee.
- H. What has been the most positive experience you have had as a woman working for General Motors?
- V Most enlightening, the thing that made me feel good more than anything, was I did it. It is just my personal opinion of course. I look back from day one until now. I look back and the second best is that I never had to ask my ex-husband for a dollar. I did it because I got up on that ladder. When I got a divorce and the man always wants you to meet him, and I told him I was not going to. I never asked him for a dollar. My children got good health care, and a good education and I was always there and that made me feel good.

- H: That is really wonderful. On the flip side then, what has been the most negative experience as a woman?
- V: It is like sometimes when you work -- we were talking about this not too long ago, us women -- sometimes when you work like a man and you constantly just work that line and you do not want to get dressed up and you do not want to fix yourself up. You keep clean. You brush your hair and things. There were times that I would not do my nails. I mean I would take a bath and I would fix my hair up, but I forgot. I did not wear dresses or skirts anymore. The negative part is that I had to remember that I was a woman, and I love being like a woman. I make sure I do my nails now. I make sure that I do my hair. I do wear dresses now and skirts. That is the hardest part because I have seen a lot of women now just, because they work out there, they lose that little feminine stuff. There are still a lot of feminine women out there, but some of them, it is hard to explain.
- H: Would you say now that the men and the women in the factory, in the union especially, have a good working relationship?
- V: Yes. It is a lot better. Men did not want the women there, even in 1977. They hired in 1970, and they did not want them there. I hired in 1977 and I worked next to a guy that would not even say hello to me. He hated women working. You took a man's job away, and there were a lot of men out there like that. Now you never hear it.
- H: This tape is all about your story and how you want to be presented. Is there anything you would like to say for people to know about you and your experiences in the union?
- V: I think that being in the union is a honor. It has spiritually helped me. When you take things for granted in life and you do not know where everything is coming from and how it is coming from, you lose a lot in life. Then you take things for granted. As you go on, you start taking more and more for granted. I had it hard when I was growing up. I had it hard when I was married. I was married to an alcoholic. When I started out at General Motors it was like another struggle. It was like always a struggle because I did not think I was going to make it. It was hard leaving my children, but I was very lucky. Like I said, remember about the baby-sitters. And as I got more and more able to give them things and the children did not laugh at them, every struggle kept getting easier and easier.
- I always found out that being involved in this union and getting involved knowing about it, really can help you learn to fight for what you have got and maybe let people understand why we need the unions here. It is not like we make a lot of money until you have been there and until you see it. When you hear union they think they make a lot of money. Remember they must be working 12 hours a day 7 days a week. If you put the 40 hour schedule in and start basing it on that, we do not make an extreme amount of money.

I just want everyone out there to know that when you believe in something whether it is a small union or a large union, learn about it. If you do not have the time to get involved, ask questions because there are so many people that cannot go to union meetings. And every Sunday, when I come in on Sunday nights, they all come to me and I will explain everything to them. There is always somebody that is willing to help you. Thank you.

H Thank you very much

End of Interview